

STARS

Florida Historical Quarterly

Volume 31
Number 2 *Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol 31,
Issue 2

Article 6

1952

The Fatio Family: A Book Review

Walter C. Hartridge



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida Historical Quarterly by an authorized editor of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

Recommended Citation

Hartridge, Walter C. (1952) "The Fatio Family: A Book Review," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 31 : No. 2 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol31/iss2/6>

THE FATIO FAMILY - A BOOK REVIEW *

by **WALTER C. HARTRIDGE**

This account of the Fatics and their descendants is a significant contribution to the regional history of our country, and it deserves to be viewed and evaluated against the background of historical writing relating to the southeast for the past century and a half.

In the years after the American Revolution, our textbooks tell us, there was little interest in the writing of history. The times were too hard. But as the nation's economy was strengthened at the turn of the century, Americans became conscious of their past. At first their interest was centered on the struggle for independence, and reminiscences of soldiers and accounts of battles were written and eagerly read. Biography, too, was not neglected: Parson Weems's life of George Washington became one of our first "best sellers."

As the century progressed Americans began to ask questions about the generations that preceded the Revolution. Town and church records were printed to meet this demand, New Englanders with their wealth of official documents taking the lead in this phase of historical writing. By mid-century the reading public had been educated beyond these simple annals. Trained historians like George Bancroft undertook ambitious projects, and general histories of America from the days of Columbus to modern times poured forth from the presses. Toward the close of the century the art of writing history reached maturity, but even then writers hesitated to abandon the narrative form to interpret the facts they had so patiently gathered.

* A paper read at the Annual Meeting of the Florida Historical Society April 25, 1952. The volumes referred to are: *Notes of My Family and Recollections of My Early Life*, New York, 1888; *A Collection of Letters, Information and Data on Our Family*, Jacksonville, 1949; and *Letters of William Johnson L'Engle, M.D., and Madeleine Saunders L'Engle, 1843-1863*, Jacksonville, 1951.

Henry Adams launched a more sophisticated approach to history. Familiar with the European schools of historical writing and accustomed from childhood to the world of diplomacy, he viewed his country as a transatlantic extension of Europe. He set himself the task of tracing the course of American history through presidential papers and diplomatic correspondence. His thesis caused much comment. Acclaimed by some, it was rejected by many. Soon a different explanation was offered by such eminent historians as Frederick Jackson Turner, who believed that the driving force in our national life was the frontier, the rough and tumble, freedom-loving pioneers of the West rather than the cultivated diplomats of the Eastern seaboard.

Succeeding generations of historians rejected the theses of both Adams and Turner. They conceived of our Atlantic seaboard as a cultural unit, through which European ways of life and thought were adapted to New World conditions. By delving into the social annals of the past, into family letters and the papers of business houses, these writers rounded out a convincing school of thought.

The writing of biography kept pace with developments in historiography. Perhaps the most interesting trend in this field has been toward family biography. The contributions of several generations of a given family were examined and found to count for more than the achievements of an individual member, however distinguished he might have been. New England was the first section to be represented in this collective approach, and James Truslow Adams's work on the Adams family remains a classic. Virginia was recognized when Burton Hendrick published his story of the Lees. One by one, other States brought forward the claims of their first families, New York the Roosevelts, Georgia the Houstons, to name but two.

Through the publication of Mrs. Susan Fatio L'Engle's "Rem-

iniscences . . .” and Miss Gertrude L’Engle’s two volumes on the Fatio family, Florida begins to take its place in this gallery of families, for the Fatics have had a part in Florida’s history throughout four changes of political allegiance. The family has been in Florida since 1771, when Francis Philip Fatio, his wife and five children, sailed into St. Augustine harbor in a chartered vessel. At that time Florida was an English colony, sparsely settled, and with few amenities. It is interesting to observe how easily this well-born family adjusted themselves to pioneer conditions, and prospered. They had an interesting background that can be matched by few of America’s other first families.

Francis Philip Fatio was a native of Switzerland with a pedigree that went back to remote antiquity in Italy. He was a relative of Madame de Stael, through whose descendants the Fatics are kin to leaders of French intellectual and social life of modern times. His wife, Maria Maddalena Crispel, an Italian lady, was of the Pazzi family of Florence. But their prestige was not diminished by their change of worlds, and they and their children came to the fore in Florida. They had a town house on the bay at St. Augustine, and a ten thousand acre plantation on the St. Johns, which was called New Switzerland for their homeland. So completely had they become identified with Florida that when the colony passed from England to Spain in 1783 and many families left, the Fatics chose to remain, and the second generation of Fatics carried on.

Louis Fatio, the eldest son, is remembered today as one of Florida’s early writers. His treatises on the trade and agriculture of his adopted land are often referred to by historians of the present day. He returned to Europe on family affairs and died there, but his daughter married in Florida, and has descendants living here. The second son, Francis Philip II, had an interesting career as an army officer under

the British regime and as a planter under the Spanish. His wife, Miss Ledbetter, was of Virginia ancestry, related to the Washingtons. Through two daughters of that union, Mrs. Dunham of St. Augustine and Mrs. L'Engle of Jacksonville, their line has been carried on.

Philip Fatio, the youngest son, was secretary of the Spanish Minister in Philadelphia, went on a mission to Mexico, and was later appointed Spanish Consul in New Orleans, where he died in 1820. His son, Francis Joseph Fatio, the third generation of the family in Florida, lived in St. Augustine and played a part in allaying tensions between Spaniard and American during the period of transition when Florida passed from Spain to the United States.

Of the daughters of the first Francis Philip Fatio, the elder, Louisa, married Colonel John Hallows, a British army officer. The younger daughter, Sophia, married a young Irishman, George Fleming. It is needless to recount here their descendants, among whom are numbered an eminent lawyer, Lewis Fleming, and a governor of Florida, Francis Philip Fleming. Hibernia, George and Sophia Fleming's plantation on the St. Johns across from New Switzerland, is still held by the family.

Happy it is for the social historian that Mrs. John C. L'Engle, born Susan Philippa Fatio in 1806, was in the 1880's persuaded by her children to record her reminiscences for preservation in the family. She performed her task well, preserving for us much that would have been lost, including many anecdotes that relate to the Second Spanish regime in Florida. She tells of the only bull fight ever fought on Florida soil, describes the pomp and circumstance that McGregor and his freebooters introduced to Amelia Island, and related happenings of her childhood spent on the family plantations that stretched along the waterways of northern Florida. The volume is one of the rarities of Floridiana.

Inspired by her grandmother's example, Miss Gertrude

L'Engle has devoted many years to amplifying the family chronicle. The result is two volumes of biographical and historical data that is an important contribution to the history not only of Florida but to that of our country.

A FERNANDINA BULL FIGHT

(The following is an excerpt from *Notes of My Family and Recollections of My Early Life* by Susan Fatio L'Engle.)

In writing of Fernandina, how many things rise up before me, indelibly impressed upon my memory!

In the last war between the United States and Great Britain, Fernandina, because of the embargo, became an entrepot for the commerce of all nations. Vessels crowded the harbor for miles, flags of many nations floating in the breeze; bales of cotton were piled up in the streets, stores and warehouses were filled to their utmost capacity with merchandise. The port was the theatre of illicit trade and the resort of smugglers, smuggling being the openly avowed business that drew the masses there. Even females carried on such traffic, which was the jest of the communities profiting by it. I remember seeing Russians and Swedes, French and Germans, in the streets. A Russian physician by the name of Boleen, not only visited in our family, but attended it professionally; and a Swede, a master of a vessel, made a swing for us children, and used to play with us and swing us under the great trees around the house.

It is the old town, not new Fernandina, that I write of. The new town, Fernandina of the present, was then a plantation owned by Mr. Domingo Fernandez. I remember being taken when a child to his plantation by my eldest sister, who was visiting one of the daughters of the family. The visit was made on horse-back, and I was indulged with a ride behind her. But another visit, prior to that, was quite an event in my young life. The commandant, Capt. Pangua

(? Paniagua?), got permission from Mr. Fernandez to have a pic-nic there- a pic-nic though, entirely of his own getting up and at his own expense. The principal families were invited, and it was to be a great affair. The commandant was young and a widower, with an only child, a boy little older than myself. He was a splendid-looking man, was deeply in love with a beautiful girl, the daughter of the "Contador," and the entertainment was given to find favor in her eyes. It was on Sunday, I am constrained to say, that this *fiesta* was given. There were a banquet and a ball, but the crowning pleasure of the day was a bull-fight. On withdrawing from dinner we were conducted to the arena. My father was one of the guests, and I was allowed to attend at the solicitation of some of my playmates, children of the "Contador," Senor Raymondo Arribas. Seats raised one above another encircled a large space. A young Spaniard, fantastically dressed in close-fitting garments, with several little red flags in his hands, marched around a little while; then several dogs of various sizes, but not at all formidable-looking, for they seemed bent on sport, were admitted. The matador played with the dogs, brandishing the flags in their faces and making them bark furiously. Then a hush, "the bull is coming," and a half-grown white bull was set loose in the arena. The dogs immediately made an attack on him, and the matador, shaking the flags in his face, incited the animal to turn on him instead of the dogs. With his stiletto he made agile thrusts and evaded attack on himself, darting up the steps of the amphitheatre when pressed by the bull. All this vastly amused the company. Cries resounded of "Bravo el torete!" when the bull had the advantage, or "Bravo Francesco!" "Bravo el Matador!" when the man prevailed. At last the little animal, which was declared to have made a good fight, was led off bleeding, but not badly hurt, they said. The company returned to the house; fruit was served - splen-

did watermelons, peaches, and figs in abundance, and dancing, which had been indulged in during the morning and until dinner was announced, was resumed. At the close of the evening we returned to the boats, the band played all the while and the moonbeams dancing on the water.